

## CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC VALUES REVISITED<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper attempts to revisit the state of contemporary Islamic values, especially in their present usage. The contemporary Islamic values seem to have been molded by the needs and trends of the changing world, while their usage seems to be meant more of worldly pursuit rather the pursuit of the world Hereafter, let alone the balance between the two. Based on a library research, this paper observes four factors that are attributable to the shaping of the contemporary Islamic values. They are the intentional or unintentional efforts of firstly universalizing, secondly realigning, thirdly accommodating, and fourthly 'scientificizing' the Islamic values. These are the factors that are believed to have entailed with the present form of the Islamic values. If this form of Islamic values were to be adopted in developing guidelines for a meaningful peace and harmony amongst various civilizations and mankind, it may mean an effort that is based on an incomprehensive meaning of the Islamic values, hence an imprecise diagnose and prescription of the problems of civilization.*

**Keywords:** Islamic values, contemporary Islamic values

## INTRODUCTION

At a glance, one may probably ask, why the word 'contemporary' is added to the title of this paper? Is it alright to categorise the Islamic values into 'the past' and the 'present'? Are there any differences between the Islamic values in the past with the Islamic values in the present contemporary changing world? Why must we revisit the contemporary Islamic values but not the past Islamic values?

The answers to these questions are as follows. The word 'contemporary' is added to the title to portray the focus of the paper, that is on the present Islamic values that have been cast to some extend by the changing world and used in a way that aligns to the changes. It is of the opinion of the author that the Islamic values have to be divided into the 'past' Islamic values that connotes the original core Islamic values, and the present contemporary Islamic values that in a way or another have been shaped in its concept and usage, to fulfill the needs and trends of the changing world. As will be shown later, these 'past' and 'present' Islamic values are different in their historical build-up as well as in their ultimate aim. While the 'past' Islamic values were built-up by the very source of Islam, that is the Qur'an and Hadith with the ultimate aim of seeking the pleasure of Allah SWT (*mardhatillah*), the 'present' contemporary Islamic values are built-up by an accommodated and modified thinking with heavy inclination to accomplish the needs of the present world, with a lesser concentration on spiritual domain and world Hereafter, hence the pleasure of Allah SWT (*mardhatillah*). It is therefore

high time to revisit these contemporary Islamic values so as to allow an investigation of their state, especially in their usage, and conclude with a stance that necessitates a further review of the contemporary Islamic values.

This is what this paper attempts to do. In so doing, this paper is divided into two main sections. The first deals with the clarifications on the division of the past and the contemporary Islamic values; and the second deals with the deliberation on the state of the contemporary Islamic values.

## THE PAST AND THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC VALUES

The Islamic values in the past in this paper refers to the original Islamic core values founded by Rasulullah SAW through the guidance of Allah SWT. They are based on the Qur'an and Hadith, practised by the Muslims especially during the earliest 300 years of Islam. Rasulullah SAW was reported to have said: "The best of my nation is my generation then those who follow them and then those who follow them" (*Sahih Bukhari*). The word for "generation" here is *qarn*. Nowadays, this word is used to mean "century", hence the 100 years each, totaling 300 years altogether.

The definition of the core values of Islam given by Imam Kamil Mufti (2015) is applicable in this sense. To him, the core values of Islam consist of firstly, the Core Islamic Beliefs, that is the Six Articles of Faith (Belief in One God, Belief in Angels, Belief in Prophets of God, Belief in Revealed Books of God, Belief in Day of Judgment, Belief in Destiny and Divine Decree); secondly, the Core Religious Practice of Islam, that is The Five "Pillars" of Islam (Declaration of Faith, Daily Prayer, Zakah, Fast of Ramadan, and The Hajj Pilgrimage to Mecca), thirdly, the Core of the Quran, that is Surah (Chapter) al-Fatihah; fourthly, the Core Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (amongst them are right intention for God, purity of God, leave aside what does not concern him, brotherhood, do not harm himself or others, not to focus on worldly gain only or concern with what people have); and fifthly, the Core of Islamic Law or Shariah, that is the *maqasid shari'ah* (the preservation of Religion, Life, Family, Mind and Wealth).

The contemporary Islamic values on the other hand refer to the present values being practised by the contemporary Muslims. Either consciously or unconsciously, the core Islamic values of the past have been molded, or in some cases eroded, gradually by the changing world, especially by the dominant ideological culture of the west. Ahmet Akgunduz (n.d.) for instance, in his sincere attempt to portray the "universality" of Islamic values to the authorities and people of The Netherland, has to confine his Islamic values only to the Core of Islamic Law or Shariah, that is the *maqasid shari'ah* (preservation of Religion, Life, Family, Mind and Wealth). Looking from Imam Kamil Mufti's (2015) definition of the Islamic values, Ahmet Akgunduz's (n.d.) Islamic value – that are said to possess the ability to perform moral responsibilities, protection of life, securing food, clothing and shelter, education, the

right to earn a living, to set up a family, *et cetera* – has been reduced to just one of the five core values of Islam.

This is one of the significant examples of how different the ‘past’ original Islamic values is with those of the contemporary ones, as a result of adjusting them with the needs of the ‘others’. Undeniably, there are also contemporary writers such as Ahmad Rafikir and Kalsom Abdul Wahab (2014) who in their writings on Islamic values stress on the aspects of both worldly and the world Hereafter as well as on *iman* (faith), *tauwheedic* (Divine belief), *ibadah* (worship) and *mardhatillah* (the pleasure of Allah SWT). However, such a stress seems to be relatively quite a rare case at recently.

## THE STATE OF THE CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC VALUES

The difference of the core Islamic values with the contemporary Islamic values may be said to have been attributable to, or as a consequence of, at least four factors. Firstly is the inclination to heavily concentrate on the universal values of Islam; secondly, the effort to align the Islamic values with contemporary socio-economic and political changes; thirdly, the approach that accommodates and modifies un-Islamic values into Islamic values; and fourthly, the endeavour to rationalize, or to what could also be precisely termed as ‘scientific’, the Islamic values with observable facts and data.

All these four factors are believed to have formed the state of contemporary Islamic values, the details of which are discussed below.

### Universalising Islamic Values

Islamic values such as good attributes (sincerity, honesty, trustworthy, diligent, cleanliness, disciplined, hard work, cooperative, justice, humble, patience, fair, *et cetera*) are undoubtedly liked by everybody regardless of their religions, beliefs, races, ethnics and colours. These values are therefore perceived as universal values that are able to become the pivot of civilizational unity of all mankind. As such, one frequently hears of the argument that Singaporeans and Japanese are more Islamic than the Muslims because of their higher disciplines and cleanliness than the Muslims themselves. So is with the western society which is regarded as more Islamic due their so-called professionalism, efficiency and open-mindedness.

Such a simplistic comparative argument needs further contemplation. Firstly, the Singaporeans, the Japanese and the western society are not holding to Islamic *aqidah* (faith). Instead, they are holding to different, and in fact contrary beliefs to Islam. They could not therefore be perceived as more Islamic than the Muslims because they are in the first place not even Muslims themselves.

Secondly, wrapping all the supposedly universal values, irrespective of Islamic or un-Islamic values into one basket would mean treating Islamic values as similar to those of the values of the others. This is definitely incorrect. The Islamic values themselves are entrenched firmly in their Islamic philosophical underpinnings that entail with a different meaning. Cleanliness for instance is meant both the physical and spiritual cleanliness termed as *taharah*, with their distinctive kind of characteristics and methods.

The Islamic values therefore could be seen to be similar to those of the others at only operational level as well as by their terms, but not at the philosophical level as well as by their implicit meanings. The Islamic philosophical underpinnings – that is those of what Imam Kamil Mufti (2015) earlier terms as the core values of Islam - are actually the roots of the Islamic values. It is these philosophical underpinnings that mold the Islamic values, hence the difference with the other values of the others. In this sense, even the Religion, Life, Family, Mind and Wealth that are embedded in the *maqasid shari'ah* and are used by Ahmet Akgunduz (n.d.) to exhibit the universalism of Islamic values too are actually having their own implicit Islamic meanings. They cannot be equalled to the rights for the religions, life, family, mind and wealth of the non-Muslims.

All in all, universalising Islamic values therefore become problematic when the core values of Islam are ignored. Unfortunately, this is the case with the contemporary Islamic values at the moment. The contemporary Islamic values have been naturally or subtly molded by and reduced to the values of the others for the sake of universalism.

## Realigning Islamic Values

The other mold of the contemporary Islamic values emerges from their realignment with the trends of the changing world. In responding to the allegations that Islam becomes a 'cultural block' to development and progress, Islamic values have been gradually aligned with the dominant socio-economic and political culture of the western ethno-centric ideologies.

In consequence, one witnesses how Islamic values are portrayed by Muslims, in certain cases rather defensively, as catalyst, not an impediment, to development and progress. The writing of Ahmad Rafikir and Kalsom Abdul Wahab (2014) could be regarded as one of them. It attempts to show that Islam emphasizes on commercial activities vis-à-vis the thinking of many western authors that alleged Islamic teaching as not governing the material aspect or success in business performance. But unlike other authors, as have been mentioned earlier, Ahmad Rafikir and Kalsom Abdul Wahab (2014) did try to relate briefly the values involved in the commercial activities with the aspects of both worldly and the world Hereafter as well as on *iman* (faith), *tawheedic* (Divine belief), *ibadah* (worship) and *mardhatillah* (the pleasure of Allah SWT).

In defending Islam against the western ethno-centric allegation, Islamic institutions such as zakat, awqaf and halal industries are insisted and aligned to be in commercialization more than in fulfilling the welfare of the ummah. Based on the western premise of the maximization of material productivity, zakat, awqaf and halal industries have been perceived as efficient means to maximizing income,

increasing purchasing power and consumption, as well as creating demand and employment. The base for consumption for example has gradually been changed from the need to the unlimited wants created by the dominant ideological culture. This conventional economic cycle and calculation moves the Islamic values gradually towards profit-oriented rather than welfare-oriented. Islamic values are used in accomplishing this endeavor, especially those values that are viewed to be workable in achieving the profit-motive and material-pursuit of the objectives.

For instance, Mohamad Khadafi Hj Rofie (2015:256) found that the most frequently stressed values by 30 authors of Islamic work ethics that he researched on was diligent (*itqan*), followed by trustworthy, just (*'adl*), sincerity, and cooperative. On the other hand, in contrary to the importance of these 'workable' values for profit and material pursuit, *taqwa* (piety) – the very core values of Islam – fell into 14<sup>th</sup> place amongst the Islamic values mentioned by these authors. Such a capitalistic inclination also could be observed in other writings. Muhammad 'Abdul Rauf (1984) for instance argues that the construction of Islamic work ethic in which Islamic values are embedded in is to create workers that could fulfill the demand by public from the perspective of employment and productivity.

In brief, the dominant western ethno-centric ideological cultures has subtly drove the Muslims to take into lesser consideration their Islamic roots that are entrenched in the other four core Islamic values mentioned earlier by Imam Kamil Mufti (2015), and realign their Islamic values with the dominant ideologies of the west, be it capitalism or socialism.

### Accommodating-Modifying Islamic Values

In universalizing and aligning the Islamic values with the dominant western ethno-centric ideological culture as above, an approach called accommodative-modification has been observed to have been used extensively. In a simple sentence, this accommodative-modification approach connotes an approach that accommodates the values of the others, modify them, and eventually name them as Islamic values, on justification that they are not contrary to Islamic faith.

In such an approach, one could hardly see the real original Islamic values anymore. The mainstream Islamic economics for instance is named *fiqh*-based neo-classical economics rather than the Islamic economics itself (Muhammad Syukri Salleh, 2011)<sup>3</sup>. This is to mean injections of Islamic values based on *fiqh* into the conventional economics structure. In this process, verses of al-Qur'an and Hadith are infused into the unimpaired structure of the conventional economics. It may be said as 'ayatization' process, that is justifying the values of the others with the *ayah* of the Qur'an and Hadith within the established conventional economics structure.

Packaged together with this accommodative-modification approach is the preservice of the conventional assumptions and definitions of concepts. Economic problems, though argued could have

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the influence of this accommodative-modification approach that led to the emergence of the *fiqh*-based neo-classical economics in Malaysia and Indonesia, see Muhammad Syukri Salleh, 2014.

been resolved by the values of Islam, are still originated from two basic assumptions of the conventional economics, viz. the scarcity of resources and the unlimited wants of the human beings<sup>4</sup>.

The definitions of the concepts too are not redefined. Poverty for instance is still measured by the conventional indexes such as the per capita income and poverty line (Muhammad Syukri Salleh, 2013). The concept of justice too suffers similar fate. It is inclined to confine the definition of justice to quantitative equality *per se* rather than also to the qualitative equality. So are other concepts. Almost all of them stick to their conventional definitions even though Islamic institutions such as zakat and awqaf are used to overcome their problems. In other words, the institutions are Islamic but the concepts are not.

The implication from such a state is self-explanatory. The Islamic institutions could not be seen as effective from the eyes of the conventional measurements, or if they are seen to be effective, the values that are accomplished are actually the conventional values of the others, not of Islam. Indeed, the Islamic institutions have in actuality contributed to the strengthening of the values of the others.

Because of the problem of the accommodative-modification approach, Muhammad Akram Khan (2013) has reviewed, or in his own term has attempted at "self-rebuttal", his earlier theory of and views on Islamic economics. About the same time, Dwi Condro Triono (2014) introduces a new kind of Islamic Economics by conceptualizing it from within the teachings of al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah themselves, vis-à-vis the Islamization of the conventional economics knowledge. He terms this new Islamic Economics as *Islamic Economics – Hamfara Mazhab*. Hamfara here is the acronym of a verse in the Qur'an, that is "*Hadza min Fadhlil Rabbi*" (An-Naml 27:40), which literally means "*This is from the favor of my Lord*".

## Scientificing Islamic Values

The last factor that molds the Islamic values is the attitude that favors scientific deliberation of everything. The Islamic values will only be accepted if they are logic and could be proven by observable facts and data. In Islamic terms, the truth of the values is determined only by *naqli* reasoning and *daruri* knowledge, hence confining their horizon to only tangible and visible values.

In consequence, when intangible and invisible values such as religiosity, *iman*, *nafs*, *et cetera* are to be enquired, proxies are used, instead of *naqli* reasoning and *nadhari* knowledge that are divinely revealed. In addition, these intangible and invisible values are only viewed from quantitative and materialistic perspective.

Such an action obviously leads to an incomprehensive deliberation of the Islamic values. Simultaneously, it shapes the Islamic values into a more mechanistic understanding, leaving their invisible philosophical underpinnings out of account.

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed deliberation on the use of these two assumptions in the mainstream Islamic economics, see Muhammad Syukri Salleh, 2011.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has attempts to deliberate on the differences of the Islamic values of the past with the Islamic values in the present, and of the core Islamic values with the common universal values. It is proven that the past Islamic values have been molded by the changing world, to fulfill the force of the western ethno-centric ideological cultures, hence the form of the present so-called Islamic values. Such a phenomenon could not cease to prevail, unless Islamic values are redefined from within and from the very roots of the Islamic epistemological and philosophical underpinnings themselves. Then the usage of the Islamic values in developing guidelines for a meaningful peace and harmony amongst various civilizations and mankind would be more meaningful and effective.



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